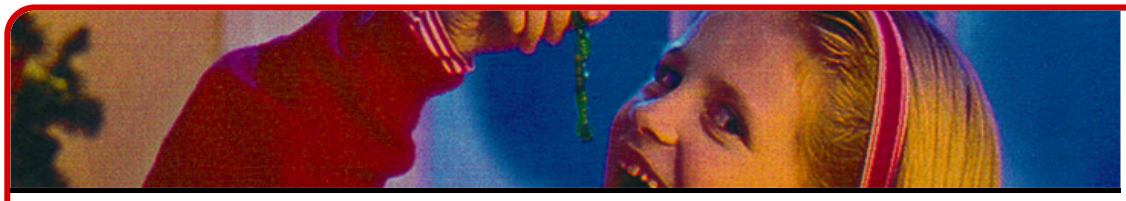

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The 1994 Toys “R” Us Big Toy Book!

461

The arrival of a new holiday season means more ancient toy catalog reviews on Dino Drac. Yay!

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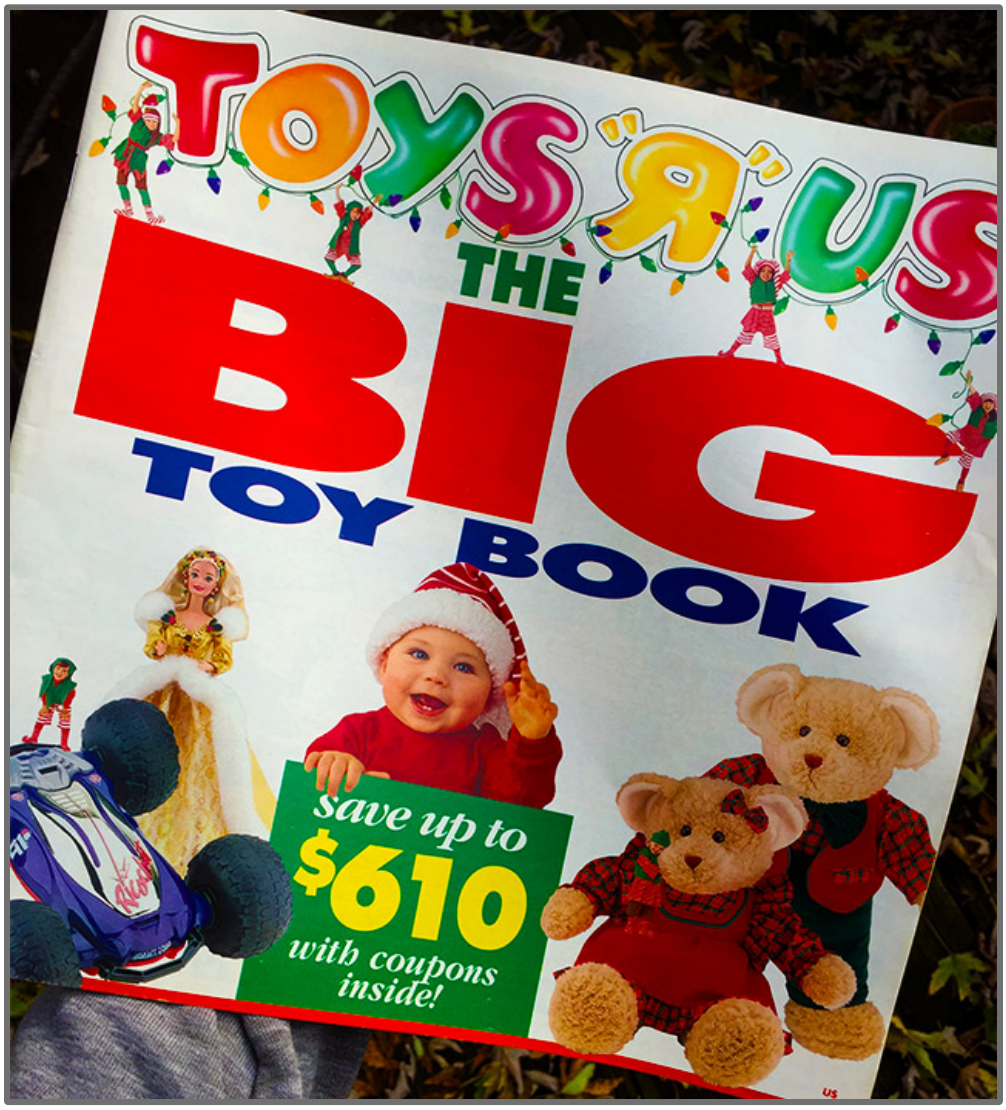

Shown above is the **1994 edition of Toys "R" Us's Big Toy Book**. By then, the Big Toy Book was far and away the most important holiday catalog out there, taking the top spot from the Sears Wish Book and never looking back.

I was a high school sophomore when this particular catalog came out, more into graphic novels and Nirvana t-shirts than action figures. Even so, it won't surprise you to learn that I kept one foot in the toy store. I had *a lot* of this junk.

Below are eight highlights from the 1994 Big Toy Book. May they make you desire old plastic things.

Donkey Kong Country!

($59.99)

I'd forgotten just how big of a deal *Donkey Kong Country* was. I got it for Christmas that year, and it was probably the last "big deal" video game that I received as a kid. (Or *arguably* a kid, anyway.)

Donkey Kong Country was still only available for pre-order by the time this catalog was mailed, but Toys "R" Us built special kiosks for kids to try the game in stores. (Good luck fighting off strangers for a controller, though.)

Vac-Man!

($22.99)

Vac-Man was part of that brief *Stretch Armstrong* revival, and easily the best part of it. I haven't run into one single champion of the 1990s Stretch Armstrong doll, but *everyone* who had **Vac-Man** still talks about him.

It's hard to describe how Vac-Man worked without tripping over your words, but I'll give it a shot:

All of Vac's limbs could be stretched to ridiculous lengths, but you could also "vacuum" the air out of him *while* he was stretched out, and lock him in weird poses. So like, if you wanted Vac-Man to have 18" arms, you wouldn't have to just sit there stretching him in perpetuity.

Micro Machines Z-Bots!

($3.99 per set of 3)

Z-Bots figures have their fans, but I'd still call them criminally undervalued. While technically existing under the *Micro Machines* umbrella, this was very much its own line.

The collection included tons of tiny little robot figures, all with more detail than action figures ten times their sizes. They were magnificent. If *Monster in my Pocket* was the '90s version of *M.U.S.C.L.E.*, *Z-Bots* was the '90s version of *Battle Beasts*.

I was too old to take more than a passing interest back then, so I'm extremely jealous of people five years younger than me. You fuckers were in the target demo for *Z-Bots*, while I was stuck getting aftershave and pants that didn't fit.

Daily Bugle Playset!

($29.99)

I'm in love with this playset. It's the Spidey version of New York, but as a stage from *Street Fighter II*. God!

I've always dug "open-ended" playsets like this. It wasn't any one character's official fortress. I could've made it *neutral territory* — a place for Skeletor and General Hawk to begrudgingly ignore each other while shopping for sweaters.

Playing with action figures that way sure beat making them punch each other.

Crayola Super Art Desk!

($15.99)

I never owned this Super Art Desk specifically, but Crayola made tons of like-styled sets. I seemed to get one for every Christmas. Plastic desks, stunted easels, hot pink briefcases, you name it.

A good crayon session could last for hours, and I loved knowing that I had *that* to look forward to once I got bored with my other gifts. It was like an insurance policy that covered me in the event that I plowed through my new video games too quickly.

Dr. Dreadful Food Lab!

($24.99)

The Big Toy Book was mostly filled with sterile product shots, but a few items were given the royal treatment, photographed within full-blown holiday sets.

It made sense with playthings that screamed "Christmas," but here we had the goddamned **Dr. Dreadful Food Lab** shot against an Xmas tree and a poinsettia-lined window. So weird, but so wonderful. It was as if all of the toys in this catalog drew matchsticks.

The contrast between that holiday backdrop and the girl eating demon worms fills me with joy.

Gorzak!
($39.99)

Lord knows what compelled Tyco to unleash **Gorzak**, a giant, battery-operated monster that seemed completely out of place in the mid-'90s toy market. (But I ain't complaining.)

Judging by Gorzak's **only TV commercial**, he was meant to menace "regular-sized" action figures from other toy companies. With Gorzak, you could introduce crazy kaiju shit to your *G.I. Joe* storylines. So cool!

Gorzak was an '80s toy living in the '90s, so it made sense that this was the only photo in the 1994 Big Toy Book that looked like it was from the 1986 Sears Wish Book.

Nintendo Games!

($9.97 & $19.97 each)

Look at those prices, and then compare them to what sealed versions of those same games sell for today. That exact reissue of *The Legend of Zelda*, for example, routinely sells for over 200 bucks.

In the waning days of the Nintendo Entertainment System, I'd often see games on sale for prices even cheaper than these. If you spent $100 on clearance-priced NES carts, you could pretty easily see a $2000 return in today's market. Hell, that copy of *Final Fantasy* alone is good for $300+!

Thanks for reading, and yes, you can expect more reviews of old toy catalogs between now and Christmas!

PS: Huge thanks to **Chris Glass** for donating this catalog! You're the man of the hour, Chris.

Posted by Matt on 11/10/17

More on Dino Drac...

Toys from the 1991 JCPenney Catalog!

Toys from the 1993 JCPenney Catalog!

Toys from the 1990 JCPenney Catalog!

The 1983 Montgomery Ward Xmas Catalog!

Highlights from the 1986 Sears Wish Book!

Toys from the 1984 Consumers Catalog!

144 Comments **Dinosaur Dracula** **matsuiny2004**

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Steven • 17 days ago

StarTropics! I have so many great memories of that game. I can still hear the music in my head. Didn't many people play it? It doesn't seem to be as popular as I think it should be. They did make a sequel but it was kind of weird.

• Reply • Share ›

Thesaurus Rex • a month ago

I'm like 90% sure that the girl in the Dr. Dreadful Food Lab ad is Mischa Barton of "The OC" fame. She's also the puking ghost in "The Sixth Sense".

• Reply • Share ›

firstname lastname • 2 months ago

Thought experiment. is that dr dreadful girl now a mother of four or a porn star (or heaven

forbid both!)? The world may never know!

• Reply • Share ›

Amanda Davis Reeves • 2 months ago

Huh...always coulda sworn that DK country was more than 60 bucks. Maybe I'm thinking of a certain racing game...stunt race fx I think it was called...

• Reply • Share ›

Merkin McGee • 2 months ago

I like the delightfully titled "Some Old Commercials I Got Off Tapes I Found In The Trash" that came up as a recommendation on the Gorzak commercial link. Don't remember Gorzak, but I would have been all over it had it came out a couple years earlier. I am sure Krang would have drafted him to take on the Turtles & Co.

• Reply • Share ›

AJ Stewart • 2 months ago

Man hit my wheelhouse on this one. I got the Super Art Desk and the Dr. Dreadful Lab - both were awesome and I still have them (although don't really use them or anything - but have been thinking of whipping out Dr. Dreadful in the last month or two). The lab was awesome and you basically made a mess of everything - a mess that tasted like heaven.

I was in that "younger than you" wheelhouse for the Z-bots but don't remember them. Either we didn't get them here in Canada or I was too focused on the regular Micro Machines which were awesome.

These old catalogs are just fantastic

• Reply • Share ›

Chris Striegel/@ChrisIsHCFest • 2 months ago

"A good crayon session could last for hours." Amen to that. Even now, as a grown ass man, I routinely buy every Star Wars coloring book I come across at Dollar Tree and Target. No shame.

Donkey Kong Country was indeed a HUGE game, and I also got it for Xmas that year. My relationship with the SNES didn't last too long, but that was one of the games I obsessively played while I did have it (Zombies Ate My Neighbors!, Super Mario World, Mario Kart, and Street Fighter 2 being the others.

Somehow I've never heard of Gorzak, but holy moly, I need him in my life like yesterday!

1 • Reply • Share ›

Ben Adams • 2 months ago

Wishbookweb.com is where I could literally spend several lifetimes.

1 • Reply • Share ›

Wren • 2 months ago

Great article, Matt! This was just the pick-me-up I needed.

I also was getting more into teen things then but still have found memories of the time. Vintage Transformers were still relatively affordable and I was still collecting Toy Biz and Kenner action figures as well as GI Joe.

I have an awesome collection of Z-Bots now but I got those in the last two years. But my fascination with them started back then after I got one from a Burger King kids meal. I loved that little Z-Bot and still have it to this day.

• Reply • Share ›

JohnV • 2 months ago

I never heard of them but those Z-Bots are cool. If they came out today they would for $5.99 a piece in a blind box.

Buying up those NES titles then would have been better than bonds. :)

Buying up those NES titles then would have been better than bonds. :)

1 • Reply • Share ›

Matt Gilbreath • 2 months ago

Had a lot of z bots as a kid. Even had the Mega Z Bot, which was beyond awesome.

• Reply • Share ›

acidforblood • 2 months ago

I remember all of these to some extent, especially Vac-Man (one of many toys my friends all had but my mom refused to buy).

Gorzak looks like the end product of a fusion between a werewolf, a xenomorph, and Godzilla.

1 • Reply • Share ›

Anthony Soto • 2 months ago

I was 10 in 1994, basically in the last years where it's socially acceptable to play with toys (or at least action figures). That didn't stop me from devouring this catalog as soon as it came out;)
We never had Donkey Kong Country as my brother and I were strictly Genesis kids. Thankfully, my cousins had the SNES and they owned it. Oh, the times we had together; them coming over to our house to play Streets of Rage and Mortal Kombat (with the blood code of course!) and us going over there to play Donkey Kong Country and Street Fighter II. Later, when my cousins moved to Yonkers, the basement of their house was set up as the "game room". Us kids would spend hours down there; talking, eating junk food, and playing on the SNES. Good times.
The Daily Bugle playset looks like something my uncle would have given me for Christmas. He always gave the best gifts:)

2 • Reply • Share ›

Briggs ➦ Anthony Soto • 2 months ago

It was before '94 I'm sure but we had one of those Easy Bake Ovens and it was like some kind of Olympic Medal. Baking those cardboard brownies was some kind of rite of passage.
That game room sounds amazing. A friend of ours had one of those uber cool houses with a full finished basement that had a ping pong table, a weight lifting area, a ballet barre thing and a gaming area. We used to watch movies and throw popcorn at stuff.
The basement here is huge, terrifying and full of big machines I've been forbidden to touch by at least 3 different people. We have the common area but it's so much cooler if it's under ground!

1 • Reply • Share ›

pikachulover • 2 months ago

I remember this catalog. I took it to school and somebody stole it. :(I remember there being some cool Superhuman Samurai Syber Squad toys in there. I was so into SSSS in late 1994.

The funny thing about art supplies they are usually given by relatives who buy a lot of toys who don't really know you an give those out. Well except for my 10th birthday in early 1994 when I asked my dad for one of those huge Crayola crayon cases with over 100 crayons in it.

• Reply • Share ›

AdamX • 2 months ago

One of the bright spots of the holidays.

Also I bet today DKC would come with a massive patch and a 1.99 for each animal buddy.

• Reply • Share ›

SolidusRaccoon • 2 months ago

I so wish I could have had a care free childhood free of wirs, and full of joy an magic. Looking at stuff like this makes me depressed.

Reply • Share ›

Eric Bellavance • 2 months ago

Admittedly, by age 14 in 1994, I was still flipping through these books. Even though I was more into JNCO Jeans and Starter jackets, I still wanted the latest video games. I begged for Sonic 3 for my Genesis system, but what I got under the tree in 94 would change my video gaming for years. Christmas day 1994 I opened....The Sega Channel!!! I don't think I left my bedroom until April. It really took until PlayStation Now was introduced for this type of On Demand gaming to be replicated. 1994 was truly a Christmas I will never forget.

4 • Reply • Share ›

Wren ➦ Eric Bellavance • 2 months ago

You had the Sega Channel—That's awesome!

2 • Reply • Share ›

Videodrome Stereo ➦ Eric Bellavance • 2 months ago

Oh, the Sega Channel! I didn't have a Genesis at the time but I wished I had. I wanted something like this for the NES so bad. That channel was way ahead of its time. How did that work actually? I never knew anyone that had it.

3 • Reply • Share ›

Eric Bellavance ➦ Videodrome Stereo • 2 months ago

There was a peripheral with a cartridge bottom that went into the system and on top was a section that connected to your home coax cable. It had lots of games and even shared tips and tricks on the loading screen that were for the game you were waiting to play.

4 • Reply • Share ›

Darkest Timeline JimbobJones ➦ Videodrome Stereo • 2 months ago

I was in college at the time, and never even heard of the Sega Channel.

That sounds amazing! Looks like you bought a separate adapter (basically a cartridge which plugged into the regular Genesis) which plugged in to coax and downloaded games via a subscription service (and a coax cable) and stored the game on the cartridge to be played. It's pretty much an early version of Steam, but a pay-per-month subscription.

I'm impressed that something like that existed way back in 1994. Sure, the Internet existed by that point, but it was very much in its infant stages. To see something that was so ahead of its time is impressive.

6 • Reply • Share ›

Eric Bellavance ➦ Darkest Timeline JimbobJones • 2 months ago

Yeah, it was pretty ahead of its time. I really didn't even use it to its full extent either. I played Streets of Rage, Eternal Champions, Comix Zone, Tiny Toons Wacky Sports, Shining Force II, and Phantasy Star IV almost exclusively. The best function was probably the fact that you could play a timed run of new games before they hit stores. It saved me from buying duds like Ecco Jr. and helped me find my love for Mutant League Hockey, which I honestly wouldn't have even heard of without the Sega Channel as it wasn't advertised much. I remember getting an "under the table" job at Pic Way shoes stocking shelves to pay for it once my parental units got tired of doing so. That was, at least, until I got my Playstation and Tomb Raider.

1 • Reply • Share ›

Videodrome Stereo → Darkest Timeline JimbobJones • 2 months ago

Wow! Now I'm really impressed. I need to read up on this more. It's fascinating.

I'm still impressed that I can buy a game online and download it without leaving the house. You even have those games on the Playstation Store that you can start playing before it's even completely downloaded. That's standard fare nowadays but I don't take it for granted.

3 • Reply • Share ›

firstname lastname → Videodrome Stereo • 2 months ago

"I can buy a game online "

*rent, they can take it back when ever they want for any or even no reason.

• Reply • Share ›

Dank meme bro • 2 months ago

I wish I was older and had disposal income back then so I could of bought all those NES games.

1 • Reply • Share ›

rogerklotz • 2 months ago

Vividly remember that Spider Man play set.

2 • Reply • Share ›

Logan Destro • 2 months ago

I never got the spider man playset even though I bought a lot of those action figures. I was able to get Gorzak I had always had him be Godzilla or some sort of Kaiju to my 1994 GI Joes. I onced had Fin Fang Foom from the Toy Biz Iron Man line be a King Ghidorah to Gorzaks King Caesar

3 • Reply • Share ›

Rydolton • 2 months ago

Doctor Dreadful is still on toy shelves. I saw it right before halloween. With this and the Grossery Gang maybe gross out toys are making a comeback?! Did they ever go away?

I was tempted to buy it, but my kids were already guaranteed to be getting tons of candy and i didn't want to end up eating it all myself.

Watch now I'll never find it on the shelf again when i do decide to buy it.

3 • Reply • Share ›

DayTripper → Rydolton • 2 months ago

Dude I really love the grossery gang. I had the chance to buy some on clearance and passed it up. Really wish I hadn't.

2 • Reply • Share ›

Brew Berry → Rydolton • 2 months ago

The gross-out toys I'd really like to see make a comeback are the Mad Scientist ones. We had the Dissect an Alien kit and the Monster Lab, and they were a lot of fun. There's a Doctor Dreadful Alien Autopsy set with edible guts and slime, but that just isn't the same. There's no figure to play with like the one that came with the Mad Scientist sets. Their "alien" is really just a stylized set of mixing bowls.

4 • Reply • Share ›

DayTripper → Brew Berry • 2 months ago

I loved Mad Scientist when I was a kid. My parents wouldn't buy it for me so I made a paper bat with paper guts on the inside that I could dissect. I think my mom still has the bat!

my mom still has the bat!

2 • Reply • Share ›

Brew Berry ➦ DayTripper • 2 months ago

Homemade paper toys were awesome! We used packs of index cards to create Wayne Manor with the Batcave, and different crime scenes connected by roads. We also made Jabba's Palace and the Death Star, and loads of other places. I'd completely forgotten about that. Next time I go shopping I've got to get some cards so my son and I can put together a layout for cut out figures and vehicles.

2 • Reply • Share ›

DayTripper ➦ Brew Berry • 2 months ago

I used to make paper transformers that would transform, too. I would make up new ones. Wish I still had 'em. =/

2 • Reply • Share ›

Videodrome Stereo ➦ DayTripper • 2 months ago

I find that a lot of times homemade and improvised toys are better than the real thing.

I used to really want the TMNT Turtle Wagon. I endlessly obsessed over it. Since I couldn't have it I took this big red pickup truck I had and converted it into my own Turtle Wagon. I drew little logos for the doors and taped them on. I made a winch for it and threw some socks in the back for sleeping bags. I loved that thing. Then on my birthday I finally got the real Turtle Wagon but it just wasn't nearly as cool. It was a bit anti-climactic for me.

2 • Reply • Share ›

Videodrome Stereo ➦ Brew Berry • 2 months ago

The Mad Scientist Lab was absolutely bad ass. That has to be one of the coolest toys I've ever owned. You had the two poseable monster skeletons you could snap together and the green mushy flesh and all the little horns and eyeballs and accessories you could attach before you dropped your babies in the vat and watched their flesh melt away, eyeballs floating to the surface. It was beautiful.

I'm all for a faithful rerelease. I never see gross out toys anymore. :(

2 • Reply • Share ›

LBD "Nytetrayn" • 2 months ago

1) Oh wow, that was the Donkey Kong Country deal my parents got -- and I still have the t-shirt, too! Neat prototype box art there as well -- *very* different from what was eventually released, right down to the logo!

2) They're doing a new Stretch Armstrong reboot, and I think the number one thing I've seen people asking about is whether Vac-Man will be in it.

3) I feel you on Z-Bots. They always seemed pretty neat, but I was kinda out of that demographic by then.

4) That was always a neat looking playset, but I don't remember what bells and whistles it had. And that Street Fighter II bit looks pretty spot-on!

5) I remember my parents getting me some big Crayola... *something* set for Christmas once, but I never quite got around to it.

6) Never had Dr. Dreadful's Food Lab or the like. How was that stuff, anyway?

7) Not familiar with Gorzak, but neat idea.

8) Man, I wish I'd been able/had the foresight to invest in some of these at the time. I'd

love to get StarTropics for that amount!

2 • Reply • Share ›

Exiles of the Underground • 2 months ago

Even the Gorzak commercial looks like it could've come from the 80s, I love it.

• Reply • Share ›

Teddy Ray • 2 months ago

I was a junior in high school and working at Kroger when this book came out. I had put toys behind me by this point, so I don't remember most of these. And that's a shame, because those Spider-Man toys are awesome, as is Gorzak. I DO remember Donkey Kong Country. I never owned it, but I rented it and I enjoyed playing it. I also remember Vac Man, for some reason, although I don't know why. I also remember most of those NES games. The only ones from that ad I owned, though, were the two Zelda games, Metroid, and Dr. Mario, which is one of the few games my dad would ever play. I don't know why, but he really liked that one.

Also, those Z-Bots look really cool. If I had known about those, I would have been all over them.

2 • Reply • Share ›

Ruler of Cobrastan • 2 months ago

Yesssss! Toy catalogue season!

2 • Reply • Share ›

Gavin Lopez • 2 months ago

The main things I remember about 1994 are DKC and Mortal Kombat II on SNES. I was around 12 by that point.

But damn I wish I had the foresight to buy a ton of those $10 NES games. By that point I had my NES in the closet and considered it beyond obsolete.

• Reply • Share ›

Hoju Koolander • 2 months ago

I got both the Daily Bugle playset and Vac-Man for my 12th birthday that year. Why I never thought to stage a "Vac-Attack" on New York and have Spidey chuck the dumpster at that bumpy, red mutant is beyond me. I did so little action figure crossover work back in the day, it's shameful.

4 • Reply • Share ›

Videodrome Stereo ➔ Hoju Koolander • 2 months ago

I never really did the cross over thing either. I was so anal about it which is kind of a shame. Now that I see the value of it I tried to get my son into it but he won't have it either. XD

1 • Reply • Share ›

LBD "Nytetrayn" ➔ Hoju Koolander • 2 months ago

Scale was always my big hang-up with doing crossovers. =\

1 • Reply • Share ›

Hoju Koolander ➔ Hoju Koolander • 2 months ago

Oh and that Spider-Man figure hanging from the retractable web line it totally not from the Toy Biz animated series line. It the multi-jointed Spider-Man from the Marvel Super Heroes Cosmic Defenders Toy Biz line. I know because it was one of my favorite figures back in the day.

2 • Reply • Share ›

Spectre ➔ Hoju Koolander • 2 months ago

Thank you! I have that figure but it was back from my Kaybee toy buying

days and couldn't remember which line.

• Reply • Share ›

FlixtheCat • 2 months ago

$70.00 for Street Fighter II? Oh come on. I'll just get my nephew Shaq Fu at funco land. It's the same thing. Right? Right...?

4 • Reply • Share ›

Ruler of Cobrastan → FlixtheCat • 2 months ago

The amusing thing is, as lame as that is, that nephew has way more interesting stories to tell now... :D

• Reply • Share ›

FlixtheCat → Ruler of Cobrastan • 2 months ago

Lol! True.

• Reply • Share ›

Jered McFerron • 2 months ago

I was 12 in 1994 and Z-Bots ruled my LIFE.

• Reply • Share ›

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